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AUTHOR	Kapraun, E. Daniel; Coldren, Doris W.
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ABSTRACT

Providing students with the opportunity to explore academic/career alternatives during the first two years of college is a basic mission of the Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) of the Fayette campus of Pennsylvania State University, which provides the first two years of numerous baccalaureate programs. Effective academic advisement, which is crucial to this mission, is provided through a dual advisor system. The generalist advisor insures that the specialist (DUS-College) advisor has adequate information regarding the academic abilities and interests of the advisee, recent academic rule and curricular changes, and the advising process. The responsibilities of the DUS-College advisor are classified into two categories: procedural and substantive. Procedural reponsibilities include: maintaining a complete and up-to-date record of each advisee's progress; insuring that each advisee possesses or has access to appropriate academic information; and maintaining a working knowledge of academic actions which require advisor approval. Substantive responsibilities of academic advisement include: developing the student's schedule; developing a realistic academic plan cooperatively with the student; evaluating the student's academic progress; and exploring an appropriate long-range academic/career goal with the student. The criteria by which effective academic advisement is evaluated at the college are also explained in this descriptive report. (DJD)

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ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

By

E. Daniel Kapraun

and

Doris W. Coldren

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JC 790 320

Pennsylvania State University
Fayette Campus

ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Providing students with the opportunity to explore academic/career alternatives during the first two years of college is a basic mission of the Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), an academic unit of The Pennsylvania State University. In addition to the guidance provided for students to consider various academic programs, the improvement of University-wide academic advising and information services is another important mission of DUS.[1] To achieve these missions, the DUS offers the following programs: enrollment of freshmen who desire to explore their abilities and interests before declaring a major; pre-college testing, counseling, and advising for all incoming freshmen; counseling and advising services for DUS students and any other student requesting specialized assistance; and an academic information support system.[2]

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

The Division of Undergraduate Studies Program at the Fayette Campus has adopted a unique organizational approach to encourage faculty involvement in its diverse activities. The purpose of this paper is to describe how faculty members have contributed to the interdisciplinary development of the DUS program at the Fayette Campus. Specifically, the role of the DUS-College adviser will be examined as it relates to providing guidance for students who wish to explore various academic/career alternatives during thier enrollment within DUS.

After an appropriate period of academic/career exploration during

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[1] Division of Undergraduate Studies: History, Mission, Goals and Programs (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1978), p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

the first two years of college attendance, DUS students will ultimately choose a major and will thus transfer from DUS to one of the ten colleges of the University. Therefore, establishing early contacts with a faculty adviser representing the college wherein a DUS student may eventually transfer is paramount. Serving as a specialist (a representative of one of the ten colleges of the University), the faculty adviser within DUS not only must be familiar with the various programs of his college but also must be receptive to the exploratory function of DUS. This adviser must be committed to the belief that "educational change and uncertainty are natural and positive developmental stages which need to be understood and accomodated."[3]

A generalist adviser is the coordinator of the Division and assists the specialist adviser (DUS-College adviser) in his advising activities. The generalist adviser supports the specialist adviser by insuring that he has adequate information concerning the academic abilities and interests of each advisee. Information is also provided concerning the latest academic rule and curricular changes. In addition, the generalist adviser provides whatever in-service training is needed by the DUS-College adviser. On occasion, the specialist may refer students to the generalist for uncommon problems of advising. The specialist-generalist approach (a dual adviser system) to acadmeic advising provides the organizational framework to facilitate the interdisciplinary or "team" effort that is essential to the success of academic advising in a complex university system. The specific responsibilities of the specialist of DUS-College adviser will now be examined.

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[3]Ibid., p. 3.

PROCEDURAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

The responsibilities of the DUS-College adviser are classified into two categories: procedural responsibilities and substantive responsibilities. Procedural responsibilities of academic advisement refer to those facets of advising which serve as preconditions for the effective fulfillment of the stubstantive responsibilities of academic advisement. In essence, procedural responsibilities should be the means to facilitate the implementation of the substantive responsibilities.

The DUS-College adviser has six procedural responsibilities:

1. To publicize and maintain adequate office hours. Accessiblity to the adviser is critical if the in-depth substantive dimensions of academic advising are to occur. Office hours must be arranged to accomodate different student schedules. For example, some students prefer to schedule Monday-Wednesday-Friday; whereas, others prefer to schedule Tuesday-Thursday classes. Therefore, the DUS-College adviser provides office hours to accommodate these different schedules.

2. To continuously update the advisee list. Since students will be transferring into and out of the Division of Undergraduate Studies each term, the DUX adviser must maintain an accurate list of current advisees. When a student transfers from DUS into a particular college, that advisee's folder is returned to the Division's headquarters to facilitate re-assignment. As soon as possible, an updated folder is forwarded to the adviser within the receiving college.

3. To maintain a complete and up-to-date record of each advisee's progress. To fulfill this responsibility, the adviser should have the following items in each advisee's folder: a profile of the student's academic abilities (a summary of SAT scores and Penn State placement recommendations relative to English, mathematics, and chemistry), a transcript or grade sheet of the student's academic progress to date, a checklist marking the student's progress for possible transfer to a particular program under consideration, the student's current term schedule, a listing of courses which have been dropped or added by the student subsequent to registration, and the records of any other special actions which may be relevant to the academic advisement process.

4. To insure that each advisee possesses or has access to appropriate academic information. This information should include a college catalog, a college handbook (relative to the college(s) being considered for transfer), a student handbook, a copy of policies and rules for students, and a schedule of classes offered each term. All of this information is essential to the effective implementation of the substantive responsiblities. The advisee is urged to review this information prior to meeting with his adviser to allow more time for an in-depth discussion of substantive issues rather than an elaboration upon procedural dimensions of academic advising.

5. To maintain a working knowledge of academic actions which require adviser approval. These include academic actions such as registration, drop-adds, pass-fail option, and course repeat. Knowledge of these actions is extremely important since they possess the potential to influence significantly the academic progress of an advisee.

6. To maintain an up-to-date file of academic rule and curricular changes. One purpose of the academic information support system [4] coordinated through DUS is the publication of academic bulletins, summarizing many of the latest academic rule changes. An academic information center, housed in a central location, provides the DUS-College adviser with access to the diverse information provided by each college concerning its latest curricular revisions.

Since the generalist adviser coordinates the flow of student and academic information essential for academic advisement, the specialist adviser receives considerable support from the generalist adviser in implementing the six procedural responsibilities. Hopefully, this

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[4]The academic information support system is designed to keep students, faculty, administrators, and professional staff members informed of academic rule and curricular changes. At Fayette, in addition to the publication of academic bulletins and the maintenance of an academic information center, other dimensions of the academic information support system include the publication of academic information newsletters, faculty office hours, and the Fayette Course Guide (detailed descriptions of courses taught at the Fayette Campus.)

will minimize goal displacement[5] by allowing the specialist adviser to concentrate on the implementation of the substantive responsibilities of academic advisement.

SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

Assuming that the procedural responsibilities of academic advisement have been successfully implemented, the DUS-College adviser through in-depth academic advising can assist each advisee to maximize the use of the educational resources available. The substantive responsibilities of the DUS-College adviser provide the raison d'etre for introducing an interdisciplinary approach to academic advisement. The effective execution of these responsibilities will influence significantly the retention of DUS students and their subsequent development of appropriate academic/career goals.

After the appropriate information has been collected, reviewed, and internalized, the DUS-College adviser is well-equiped to assist each advisee in developing a realistic program of study. Each term a schedule of courses can be developed that is consistent with the student's academic abilities, predetermined by placement test scores and academic progress to date. For students who may be experiencing academic difficulty or who are taking critical courses, such as calculus level mathematics (or related subjects), the adviser's primary concern is not to overload these students with too many courses. Developing a strong academic foundation is essential in all programs, but it is especially critical in most science-oriented programs. Other students who have a basic skill deficiency in writing and/or mathematics should be encouraged to eliminate these

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[5]Amitai Etzioni, Modern Organizations (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 10.

deficiencies as early as possible in their academic program. The critical importance of basic competencies in writing and mathematics is stressed because of the direct relationship to other skills essential to the completion of the associate or baccalaureate degree.

Early in a student's enrollment within DUS, the DUS-College adviser and advisee should cooperatively develop a realistic academic plan, outlining the tentative academic courses which the student should take during his enrollment within DUS. This plan should include courses that the advisee might study during the next three to six terms (one to two academic years). Naturally, flexibility must exist. Even though changes in the academic plan may develop from one term to the next, an academic plan, nevertheless, will provide the student and adviser with a basis for monitoring progress toward a particular academic/career goal. Academic progress in key courses will provide vital feedback as to the advisability of continuing a particular program.

The evaluation of academic progress is a second substantive responsibility. Each term the DUS-College adviser should monitor the academic progress of each advisee by asking such relative questions as: "Is the advisee making satisfactory academic progress?" "Does the student demonstrate the potential for the program under consideration?" "Is the student with outstanding ability being challenged by the academic program?" A careful review of grade reports and discussions with the advisee will provide the pertinent information to answer these questions. Once a sound judgement has been made concerning the progress of the advisee, the adviser should provide the advisee with a formative evaluation. This evaluation can consist of a series of recommendations concerning improvement of academic performance,

alternative program selection, specialized course work to ascertain aptitude for a particular program, or any number of related recommendations.

Undoubtedly, the need to assist each advisee in the initial exploration of an appropriate long-range academic/career goal is another extremely important substantive responsibility. Two approaches can be used by the DUS-College adviser to assist the advisee in developing a realistic long-range goal. First, the adviser, remembering that the DUS student is undecided or considering one or more academic programs, should help the advisee to develop an appropriate exploratory program. The DUS student should be introduced to key survey courses as early as possible in his academic program. For science-oriented students,[6] key survey courses should include introductory courses in calculus and chemistry. For non-science students,[7] key survey courses should relate to the program(s) being considered. For example, a political science student should experience an introductory course in national government or American public policy within the first term or two of college attendance. Another student considering education should experience introductory courses in psychology, educational psychology, and cultural foundations of education. In essence, the exploratory program should help the student to evaluate at an early stage the relationship of academic

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[6]These students plan a transfer to programs which require extensive course work in college-level calculus and science. These programs are found in the Colleges of Agriculture, Earth and Mineral Sciences, Engineering, and Science.

[7]These students plan a transfer to programs which do not require extensive course work in college-level calculus and science. These programs are found in the Colleges of Art and Architecture, Business Administration, Education, Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Human Development, and Liberal Arts.

strengths and weaknesses to the academic/career goal(s) being considered. With feedback from professors (as manifested in grades and comments concerning potential for success in particular programs) and the intrinsic satisfactions associated with the study of key courses, the DUS student can determine the appropriateness of a particular area of study.

The second approach to developing a realistic long-range academic/career goal is the proper referral by the DUS-College adviser to various specialized support services available on campus. Many students are concerned about the relationship of an academic program to the job market and often ask, "Will this program prepare me to enter the work force in a challenging and rewarding position?" Referral by the DUS-College adviser to the career development and placement office allows the student to study vital information concerning employment opportunities in various fields of endeavor. In addition, a competent professional is available for those students who may desire an in-depth analysis of their abilities for various career fields. Other referrals may relate to the acquisition of financial aid, the improvement of study skills, and access to other services designed to facilitate the teaching-learning process. These referrals reflect those types of assistance whihc will hopefully increase the retention of students who are indecisive about a major, so they will persist toward the achievement of an appropriate academic/career goal.

CRITERION OF EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

After reviewing the procedural and substantive responsibilities of the DUS-College adviser, a logical question arises: "How do we know when the DUS-College adviser has been successful in implementing these various responsibilities?" or, worded another way,"What is a criterion or indicator

of effective academic advisement?" Initially and perhaps rather superficially, the decision of a DUS student to pursue an appropriate academic/career goal would indicate that the DUS-College adviser has been successful in advising a DUS student. Undoubtedly, this is a valid output indicator; however, a more sophisticated indicator of the qualitative success of the academic advisement process would be the evolvement of a relationship between adviser and advisee characterized by friendship, trust, and mutual respect. When this kind of relationship evolves, the adviser will serve as the coordinator of the student's learning experiences.[8] Consequently, the adviser functions as the advisee's primary reference person because the advisee has developed confidence and trust in the adviser's knowledge and judgement. Therefore, the adviser serves as the integrator of the diverse information and assistance received by the advisee from the various campus resources.[9] Thus, the advisee will view the DUS-College adviser as the principal campus person who is eager to assist in personalizing what may seem to be rather impersonal information. When the adviser functions in such a coordinative role, the academic advisement process has been successful in facilitating the affective as well as cognitive growth of students who have been unsure of their academic/career directions.

An analysis of the 1977-78 Fayette Campus adviser evaluations indicates that the DUS-College advisers have been successful in facilitating the cognitive and affective development of DUS students. Collectively, the DUS-College advisers received the following ratings from their advisees

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[8]Melvene D. Hardee, Faculty Advising in Colleges and Universities, Student Personnel Series No. 9 (Washington: American College Personnel Association, 1970), p. 11.

[9]Ibid.

on these dimensions:

1. Is consistently available, on time, for appointments with you - 3.5 rating.
2. Keeps regular adequate office hours - 3.44 rating.
3. Is aware of and has access to information you need - 3.43 rating.
4. Takes time to become acquainted with you personally - 3.44 rating.
5. Discusses your academic goals and progress toward these goals with you - 3.25 rating.
6. Refers you, when necessary, to the proper college representative, administrative staff member, or counselor - 3.23 rating.
7. Is one with whom you have a congenial relationship - 3.21 rating.
8. Has a positive constructive attitude towards advising in general - 3.52 rating.
9. Keeps you up to date on changes in your course of study - 3.29 rating.
10. The overall rating of the DUS-College advisers relative to the nine dimensions of advising activity is 3.37.

All ratings are based on a scale ranging from a maximum rating of 4.0 (excellent) to a minimum rating of 0 (needs improvement). Specifically, the following numerical rating scale is used:

4.0 -- 3.5 --- 3.0 --- 2.5 -- 2.0 -- 1.5 -- 1.0 -- 0.5 -- 0.0
(Excellent)(Good)(Average) (Needs Improvement)

A preliminary review os the advisee ratings indicates that the DUS-College advisers received two "excellent" ratings (#1, #8) and seven "good" ratings (#2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #9). A further review reveals that the lowest ratings was 3.21 (#7), which is considerably above the minimum "good" ratings of 3.0. Also, three ratings (#2, #3, #4) are above 3.4, thus closely approaching an "excellent" rating.

For the future (contingent upon the availability of funds), a more in-depth analysis of the success of academic advising within the Division of Undergraduate Studies is under consideration. Possible

evaluative approaches being considered include extensive exit interviews (when students transfer from the Division to a college) and detailed, periodic follow-up studies to determine their success in the programs selected and, ultimately, to determine career/life satisfactions. An emphasis will be placed on assessing intrinsic as well as extrinsic satisfactions associated with academic/career decisions.

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